

ZYGOTE

Zygotte celebrates a triumph for privacy as snooping bosses get their wrists slapped, but it could become meaningless when Microsoft realises its plan to read our very minds

ASIAN BABES

It's like taking candy from a global baby. Yet another scam has been perpetrated by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which, as Zygotte will never tire of reminding you, is a self-appointed US cartel set up to tax the stupidity of the rest of the planet. This time ICANN has set its sights on the world's fastest growing market, Asia.

In the past, internet domain names were always registered on a first-come first-served basis, but the new .asia domain involves lobbying out registrations to the highest bidder. The usual scare stories have been pumped out, to the effect that if a company does not pay their .asia ransom, crooks will snap it up and use it to damage the company's reputation. To make sure this actually happens, ICANN is allowing anyone to register any .asia domain as from February.

In which case, Zygotte will bid a few quid for euthan.asia, and set up a site calling for ICANN to be terminated by lethal injection.

SNOOP DOG EAT DOG

Seven years ago, the UK government introduced legislation that allows employers to monitor computer use at work, as long as they tell their employees they are doing it. Now the European Court of Human Rights has given our government a boot up the backside for allowing such snooping.

It all stems from a test case against a Welsh college that collected information about the online habits of a female employee. The Eurocrats concluded this was a breach of her human rights because it denied her the right of privacy. This has huge implications for what has become standard practice in the British workplace, especially as the European Court includes telephone calls. Listening in to other people's phone conversations, poking around email folders and trawling browser log files has been declared illegal, and any data held on employees' communications will have to be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act. If this affects you, tell your boss that the European Court of Human Rights has just levied a punitive fine and costs against snoopers sniffing around where they shouldn't.

PDFFAILURE

Many of you will know that it is possible to track updates and corrections in a Word document. This can be particularly amusing if it reveals text that was never meant to be seen by the reader. You may also think that using Adobe's PDF can overcome the problem. This wasn't so in the much publicised Formula 1 Racing case, which saw McLaren fined £50 million for spying on its rival Ferrari. Much of the evidence was

based on emails and texts containing trade secrets, and Le Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile was responsible for publishing the 115-page transcript on the day the McLaren verdict was reached. They used PDF and they carefully blacked out all sensitive data before posting the court record on the web. What they failed to realise is that a standard copy and paste into a text-based file would reveal the very same data that Ferrari needed to protect.

As soon as this monumental cock-up was pointed out, the file was removed "before any damage could be done". But the web doesn't work like that. Files can be cached remotely as soon as they appear. Zygotte knows of a number of copies that have escaped into the wild. Let that be a lesson to you all.

MIND OUT

Microsoft has applied for a patent to filter extraneous signals from human brain activity in order to study what you are really thinking. Yes, folks, the mighty Microsoft is trying to buy the rights to read your mind. But don't worry – it won't hurt a bit. Microsoft says you will not need to shut your eyes, sit still or have lots of little holes drilled into your skull. In fact, the technique is allegedly cheaper and simpler than traditional methods of recording brain waves.

The problem seems to be that the company can't quite figure out the interaction between people and computers, so it needs a method of cutting out all your random thoughts and concentrating on the serious business of charging you for the use of your own brain. If there is any truth in the notion that the average male thinks about sex every seven seconds, millions of computers will soon be swamped by unwanted pop-ups.

MAKES YOU SPIT

Transmission Control Protocol, commonly known as TCP, is the key to delivering the data streams of bytes that make file transfers and emails possible. Zygotte is writing these words on the 30th anniversary of the first TCP transmission, which some historians cite as the world's original internet connection.

It happened near what is now the site of the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California, when a data file was sent by radio from a slow moving truck on the highway, just south of San Francisco. The data was routed to Boston, then over to Norway, through to the UK, onwards to West Virginia and finally all the way back across the Atlantic to its final destination, the University of Southern California. What marks the event in history is the fact that the transmission was achieved over three completely separate networks, so 'inter-networking' became a reality and the internet was no longer a theory but a fact.

However, according to Zygotte's bathroom cabinet, TCP is also a phenol-based virus killer for use as a powerful mouthwash and strategic vaginal douche. This may be taken as hard evidence that web-based transmission protocols have always been associated with viruses spread by unwise juxtapositions. ☹

Great Moments in Computing

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240: SKYPE

Skype uses peer-to-peer software for messaging, telephony and video conferencing

Users can customise their Skype environment, so office backgrounds can be replaced by exotic locations

...or vice versa